



Catalyst/Assembl Pilot

Final Report

Ashoka Changemakers

May 29, 2015

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Summary

From March to May 2015, we ran a pilot with a group of social innovators in the field of learning and play using the [Assembl Collective Intelligence online platform](#). The original community had been gathered during an online [challenge](#) launched in partnership between Ashoka Changemakers and the LEGO Foundation, and had been interacting via a Facebook Group for 6 months. To launch the pilot, we cultivated an activators core team of 8 innovators who would lead the discussion and collaboratively decide on best strategies and next steps.

The pilot was open to the public on March 27, 2015, and the discussion lasted for 8 weeks. We had 62 registered users, from 32 countries, who generated 141 messages. The NPS score among users registered on the platform was 71. According to the analysis of interaction among our core team and participants, the discussion on the platform and the final survey, we have concluded that Assembl is an interesting and potentially powerful tool for engagement of a diverse network and the development of a collective learning process. However, the current technical problems prevent the discussion to evolve at the desirable pace and must be solved before an extended effort is launched. Especially when the target user group has very limited time to learn how to participate, as is the case with social entrepreneurs.

Introduction

In April 2014, the LEGO Foundation and Ashoka teamed up to launch the “[Reimagine Learning Challenge](#)” as part of a three-year partnership.

The challenge was conceived on the belief that in the face of critical and complex challenges, children and young people need to better develop creativity, imaginative problem-solving, teamwork, empathy, and inspiration to be able to step into leadership roles in pursuit of purpose; and so we need to find ways to transform the way the world learns.

The Challenge outreach was specifically seeking for innovations that were (but not limited to):

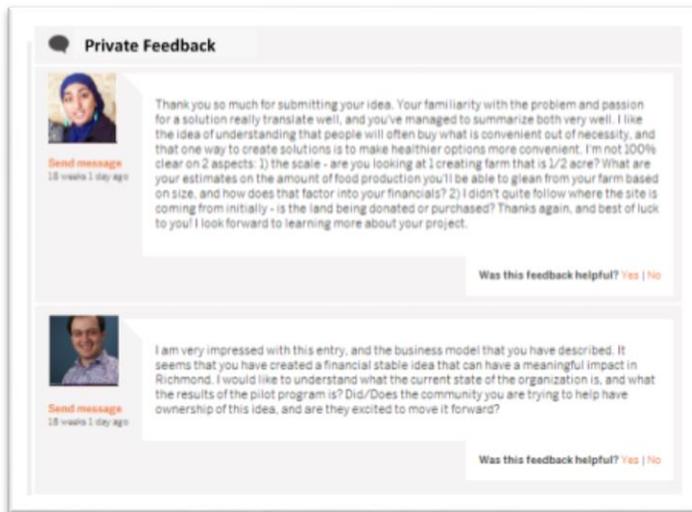
- Creating safe and inclusive environments for play and physical activity within and beyond the school day
- Helping students to be protagonists in their environment, to exercise full citizenship, and to find affirmation for their needs and ideas
- Developing methodologies to create new learning materials through play
- Developing innovative training models for parents, teachers and educators
- Designing experiential education programs that foster creativity, open-mindedness and student engagement

Entries to the challenge closed on June 25, 2014, and it attracted 634 social innovation projects from more than 60 countries who combine “learning and play” in their social impact.

Ashoka Changemakers then applied a crowd-review process, combined with an internal review, to select the projects that were best aligned with the Challenge goals. A detailed description of the process [can be found in this link](#). The process worked in four stages:

- Inviting participants to review each other’s projects
- Analyzing the reviews and selecting the entrants that presented the best evaluation rate
- Inviting top reviewers to become “Trusted reviewers” and be part of the evaluation team
- Crowdsource a collection of more than 2800 reviews among Trusted Reviewers, experts, Ashoka Staff and Network partners

After the crowd-review process, 306 high-potential “Pacesetters” were selected from the broader entry pool for enhanced network opportunities. This highly activated group had already received an average of six narrative reviews on their projects, and were then invited to participate in a Facebook Group.



Example of reviews received by the entrants.

The Pacesetter Re-imagine Learning Community continued interacting via the Facebook group, where participants could share articles and news from their projects. On October 11, as the Challenge progressed, we announced 30 Pioneers projects, recognizing the best innovations among the Pacesetters, which would be presented to a Judging Panel.

Even as the Champions were announced on November 6, during the WISE Summit in Doha 2014, activity on the Facebook group continued to happen, which made it clear the potential and desire for the participants and social innovators to continue being part of the community, exchange knowledge and evolve their practices.

Through the Catalyst Project, we hoped to test the Assemble platform, using it as a pilot to learn more about our #play2learn network, create useful conversation and produce knowledge for the network at large.

The aim is to accelerate the connections among the social innovators of the Reimagine Learning Challenge. On Assemble, they can continue to engage and actively share knowledge, and co-build insights and connections around concrete discussion topics.

Also, the Re-Imagine Learning team has developed an Innovation Report that maps trends and barriers in the field of “learning and play”. We used the [Innovation Mapping “Entrepreneurial Paths for the Future of Learning”](#) as the starting point for the discussion and structured the debates around the key barriers and design principles that the report highlights.

Note on privacy

To preserve the privacy of the participants, we have removed the names from the testimonies and emails included in this report. To contextualize the comments, we have used the following system:

- Member of the Activators Group
- Active Participant
- Invited Participant

Network Activation Strategy

The network outreach strategy to invite our community to test Assembl consisted of three steps:

- Select and cultivate an activators core team of eight innovators to lead the discussion and collaboratively decide on best strategies and next steps.
- Establish recurring weekly meetings with the team to define strategies and next steps for the pilot, support participation and contribute to the conversation.
- Outreach for the broader community via email and Facebook Group

Below, we detail each of these steps.

Activators group

Our core group of 'activators' were selected from the most active members on our Facebook group and through the peer review process. Our activators group readily agreed to commit their time and efforts on the shared vision of building this network. Among other things, we committed to meet every week for check-ins; learn how to use Assembl, take training sessions with Laura, and contribute to the conversation; share feedback about Assembl; and help bring people to the platform (outreach).

Our Activators group

- 1) Geraldine O'Brien, [LifeStor Digital Story Archive](#)
- 2) Jim Salmons, [FactMiners](#)
- 3) Timlynn Babitsky, [Softalk Apple Project](#)
- 4) Chrissy Pirounaki, [Agoge Omikron Omega](#)
- 5) Floyd Mayfield, [Chichetekelo School of Arts and Science](#)
- 6) Grant Hosford, [codeSpark](#)
- 7) Nicole Forsyth, [RedRover Learning](#)
- 8) Sumitra Pasupathy, [The Children's Centre for Creativity](#)

The team was led by Supriya Mukherjee, our staffed Community Manager for the engagement.



The activators team developed throughout the pilot period, establishing relationships and trust among each other. It was key to our ability to work together, to be able to share insights and discuss beyond the scope of Assembl and our own projects. While each member would bring their own experience and insights regarding the best ways to move forward, it was only through careful, personal conversation that the group acquired the confidence to lead the newcomers to the platform.

The activators role was key to the success of our pilot, as they ensured appropriation of the platform by the community we wanted to engage. Below we present their perspective on the tool and the experience.

Testimony from activators

As the main actors in our outreach and discussion strategy, the activators have a privileged point of view regarding the use of the platform. They took the time to become familiar with the platform, providing us with rich and extremely insightful feedback. The below testimonies were provided at the end of the pilot.

Member of the Activators Group

Overall: The goal of the tool is fantastic and I think it could be powerful with some key changes. However, it was hard for me to understand why this tool would be significantly better than a private group on Facebook or on a work tool like Slack.

It was much too hard to get started.

Onboarding

Getting started is the biggest issue with Assembl. We are a technically literate group and it was hard to know what to do first and why. There was no clear starting point.

I would strongly recommend picking the most common use case (shared discussion for example) and building an on boarding flow around that.

UI

As a group we found the user interface to be confusing – in particular the three column format made it hard to know what was most important. Also, we've all been trained by tools like Facebook to expect the most important content to be right in front of us. Having three columns should probably not be the default view – maybe just an option.

Also, the various tab options were confusing – again, I didn't know where to start or what to focus on

Taxonomy

Assembl has created it's own lingo around discussions that I found distracting. I think it would benefit from using more common terms and from defining those terms clearly when you start using the too.

Member of the Activators Group

What I liked:

-The concept of harvesting and the harvesting tool was great. Being harvested was reinforcing as a participant, and reading harvested nuggets was a great way to get a quick feel for the content of the discussion and the ideas discussed.

-I loved feeling like I was connected to people who are dreaming big, sharing ideas and seeking to change education.

What I would change or ideas to consider in developing further:

-The idea of having a place to encourage dialogue and debate with more narrowly defined topics/questions or a platform where ideas could be gathered like a "think tank" before action is taken is a great one, but I think this needs to be made more obvious in the design. A platform like this, once developed further, may not work unless the "next steps" of where these ideas might go is made clear ahead of time by whoever is using the platform.

-I think visually the platform the way it is currently set up and organized may be hindering the goal. The topics organized on the left never seemed to make much sense, and I wasn't sure how new categories happened? Perhaps topics need to be organized or appear more like mind mapping/bubble maps, maybe like Prezi presentation software? Having three panels made it difficult to know where to start. I was also never really sure where new posts could be found.

-In order for the platform to be used, I think it needs to be more user-friendly and a more obvious improvement over Facebook or LinkedIn groups. It would also need to be better at notifying people when any contribution was added (not just a reply to a post), and it would need to be mobile with an app to access the platform more easily.

-Although being harvested was reinforcing, I'm not sure this was as powerful a reinforcer as the "Like" button or comments on Facebook. It also seems like there needs to be more to encourage or reinforce dialogue around the same topic: encourage feedback and continual conversation. Perhaps if the platform was designed to have a human moderator in mind to add comments, connect people's responses and keep topics organized and moving forward this would help?

Member of the Activators Group

Interlacing my observations on Assembl as a conversation tool and The Reimagine Learning Challenge. Play is a great starting point for both. Assembl could be much more fun, intuitive and using the principals of gamification to delight and add curiosity to site platform to hold the attention of users. Nowadays, it's easier to explore than take time to read the instructions on the box.

In my childhood, Lego boxes had no pictures to follow and this encouraged imaginative construction play at an early stage.

Pausing here to insert a story. While on holidays last summer in Italy, I was thinking about play as I was considering entering a LifeStor proposal in The Reimagine Learning Challenge.

My attention was diverted to watching some attentive parents at the waters edge with their barely toddling baby. The Dad took the role of a water carrier with two buckets challenging the surf to bring back the water to the Mum who filled the toddler's watering can constantly.

The expression of amazement the child's face as he explored the watering cans different uses, using it upside down, sideways it created an arch of water that the sunlight sparkled on, or with sprinkler head it simulated the impression of creating rain from the spout.

The look of wonder on the parents faces as they saw the expression of amazement on the child's face as replayed all the different ways over and over, was heart rendering.

I silently observed the natural teaching ability of this silent lesson, It was accompanied by happiness, delight sunlight, water and love. It transfixed me and his parents for at least 20 mins. In this story the child was driving his own learning in his own way at his own pace, the parents took the role of his assistants.

Reflecting recently on this memory caused to think this is what Reimagining Learning is.

It also made me see a way Lifestor could play a role.

Member of the Activators Group

I have mixed feelings about the Assembl tool. It is better than the Face Book group in terms of actually engaging interaction. But I feel that it fell short of the vision we had of being able to develop new collaborative insights into the questions.

People expressed what they were familiar with. Some of us reiterated the same "it should be like this" and "this is what's wrong" with no new insights, just a bit more of the sameo-sameo frustrations and "education needs to change." There were a few gems: Nicole stands out for having made some good new points to think about, especially near the end

By my count and not counting you and Dani, there were a little over 20 people who participated. A number of them wrote one comment and did not appear again. A few participated much more. This is a very typical "power curve" (a.k.a. "power law" or the 80/20 rule) distribution found in a wide range of physical, biological and social phenomenon: a few people interact a great deal, but most just barely, and the rest not at all.



So if we are trying to capture a wide spread of opinions and ideas from a large group (such as the Pacesetters), you will only get a few folks who really participate. Assembl would be a useful tool indeed if the platform provided a new way to be able to push past the very typical power law of participation. It does not do that now.

I also felt that Assembl was not much different from a typical Forum discussion. Other than the summary at the end of a topic, Assembl seemed very similar to most Forums. And actually years ago when I participated in several Forums, there were one or two where discussions were summarized for the group. So I didn't see anything much new in Assembl, although the marketing story sounded good.

Bottom Line: Assembl is an improvement over Face Book for conversations. But I do not see it as anything much different than a Forum platform.

From the discussion above, it is clear that the goal of Assembl as a conversation tool is powerful and has great potential. Features like “Harvesting” have been very well received and inspired the contributors to stay connected.

However, the user-interface seems to be a common cause of concern and the visual display of the site seems to be confusing. The 3-column panel makes it hard to use and is seen to confuse some of the audiences. In addition, not being mobile app-friendly is perhaps a huge barrier/disadvantage of the platform.

Assembl is a great tool but it needs to evolve into a platform/ forum that encourages and makes participation easy and inviting.

Incentives for participation and our pre-launch discussion

Our Pre-launch discussions focused on two main questions: 1) what are we trying to do with the Assembl project following the Reimagine Learning challenge? 2) How are we going to bring people to the platform?

Post a lot of brainstorming, we raised many questions and a pool of ideas emerged. To sum up, the following seemed most vital at the outset to ensure the project took off successfully:

- 1) That the Assembl space needed to be easy-to-use for new users to come on board and stay engaged through the conversation;
- 2) We need to create incentives on the Assembl space for people to want to participate and be part of this network;
- 3) Structure the debate around the key barriers and design principles of the Innovation Report to lend the debate its desired direction

Some voices from our pre-launch discussion

Assemble has to be easy to use and help achieve result-oriented output. It's important that we pursue some core idea and use assemble within ourselves and bring people to a tried and tested platform on which they see value-ad. It may not work to ask people to come on the platform and then say, 'let's see what we can do here'. - Member of the Activators Group

As a core group, we are like the ambassadors of goodwill and that will determine whether people come or not. We want to actively be that kind of 'synthesiser' to help people be part of the group. We will have to put in extra effort to get people on that platform in the beginning, create a 'kindred spirit'. Once that is in place, our goals will be much closer. - Member of the Activators Group

We are all looking at the elephant together. Each of us is working on one aspect and learning together. Eg: We tried this and may be this will work for you; Main idea through Assemble is building a community knowledge of how play to learn works. Have conversations and draw conclusions. - Member of the Activators Group

To begin with what we pull onto the platform is the advantage of connectivity. Being connected means a lot, especially in the context of Asia. But then the next question quickly arises, what next? What is it beyond a bunch of people coming together and discussing a subject? We need to get partners and experts who can join the network from time to time. - Member of the Activators Group

Keep the conversation within the thematic scope of reimagine learning/education and how we want it to be. - Member of the Activators Group

Excited to try Assemble out and get people to try something new and create a mind shift. Want to see how this can help especially to convince teachers and schools that 'hey, this is what the kids want'. - Member of the Activators Group

Incentives

We discussed the following incentives that might encourage people to join Assemble and be part of this network building exercise:

- Changemakers is going to list the names of all the activators, their projects, in the documents, we are going to distribute in the idea conference to recognize individual contribution
- A chance of conversing with the experts in the field
- Mention of the best contributions in the Assemble report to be shared with the Ashoka Network

Some thoughts about the incentives discussion worth sharing

*This is a conversation that we have had going for a while: we know social entrepreneurs are extremely busy people. However, we also know, from many successful stories here at Ashoka, that when they are able to work together, they can produce incredible results. Still, the question that always emerges is what is the right balance of structure and incentive that will bring people to feel that their time investment is worth it - *especially* in the beginning? When we launch a Challenge there is a strong push for people to come together and share their projects, because of the prize incentive. However, more and more we are faced with the question - how can we continue interacting and supporting those that don't get any prize? - Dani Matielo, Network Activation Practice Leader, Ashoka Changemakers*

In the Win-Win economy, there are about 5 larger areas of "currency" other than money that people value. This whole idea of Influence Without Authority is what Jim and I have been using since about 1998 in developing our networks and collaborators on projects. The "currencies" are anything that someone values that you may be able to exchange with them for something you value and need for your project. This is a large topic. Suffice here to include a few very brief examples below: INSPIRATION-RELATED CURRENCIES (e.g., Vision i.e., Being involved in a task that has larger significance for unit, organization, customers, or society TASK-RELATED CURRENCIES (e.g., Challenge/learning - i.e., Getting to do tasks that increase skills and abilities POSITION-RELATED CURRENCIES (e.g., Visibility or Recognition - i.e., Acknowledgment of effort, The chance to be known by higher-ups or significant others in the organization RELATIONSHIP-RELATED CURRENCIES Acceptance/inclusion Feeling closeness and friendship Understanding Having concerns and issues listened to Personal support Receiving personal and emotional backing PERSONAL-RELATED CURRENCIES (e.g., Gratitude Appreciation; e.g., Self-concept- i.e., Affirmation, values, self esteem and identity. - Member of the Activators Group

Whatever we do, it has meaningful use of people's time or participation will not last long. People have to feel they are getting something out of participating. The Win-Win economy is important. - Member of the Activators Group

The whole idea around play, creativity has this big question 'so what?'. I think system changers (innovation map) is really key and if we could get more traction around those topic areas, (there is a lot of work coming out of Australia and such); get experts; an economic equation needs to be plugged in too I think. - Member of the Activators Group

Outreach for the broader community

After finalizing our discussion about the structure and outreach strategy with our activators group, our first round of outreach commenced on March 18, 2015. We did a few rounds of outreach throughout the active discussion period. The plan for outreach was to:

- Email blast to our English speaking database of Pacesetters inviting them to join Assembl
- Post on our closed Facebook group
- Lend tech support and troubleshooting assistance to facilitate participation

The following messages were used for outreach:

Examples of messages that we used for outreach

First message sent out on March 27, 2015:

You will remember that by the end of last year, I mentioned that there would be some interesting activities around our Re-imagine Learning Network in 2015. You have likely seen some of the articles we have published this year, and G+ Hangouts we have hosted. Now is the time to have your voice heard: my invitation today is for you to join us on a hands-on discussion, as we are launching the Re-imagine Learning Network Assembl discussion space. In the next 6 weeks, we will host online discussions about the most pressing topics around play, learn and education.

This is a curated space for selected social entrepreneurs working to change the way the world learns, together with invited thought leaders, to share your ideas and solutions, and deepen your connections with the rest of the network. The results of these discussions will be summarized in a report to be shared with the broader Ashoka network and the LEGO Foundation, with quotes from the best contributors. We'd love to have your input!

The triggering question this week builds on two recent articles on how to equip adults to be changemakers in learning: "Imagine This: Creative Play and 21st-Century Learning", by Tim Scheu, and "Promoting Playful Learning Through Teacher Networks", by Philipp Schmidt, where they talk, respectively, about the roles of parents and teachers to stimulate children creativity. We know that the needs of the 21st century demand we re-imagine learning – how do you see the role of parent versus teacher in this process? How do we support them? What is the most important thing to keep in mind, and what solutions are out there?

Click here to join the discussion today (see a quick Jumpstart Guide below my signature on how to use Assembl).

We look forward to having you participate in the debate!

Cheers,

Dani, Jim, Timlynn, Chrissy, Nicole, Geraldine, Grant, Sumitra, Supriya and the rest of our Re-imagine Learning Activators team

Follow-up message sent out on April 3, 2015

I am writing to follow up on Dani's email from last week. We saw you signed up to on Assembl, but didn't join the conversation yet. Please let me know if you need any assistance in navigating the Assembl platform or have any questions regarding participation.

We are keen to know what you think about the roles of teachers and parents in re-imagine learning?

At the end of next week, we will summarize the discussion on a blog post that will be shared on the Ashoka's website, quoting the best contributions.

Also, if you could mention your region specifically in your next email, I could connect you with our activator from your region who will help you with any queries or doubts going forward.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

Outreach highlights

- The first round of outreach was met with a lot of curiosity: we saw quite a few registrations: 70% of the people saw the emails and learnt about the launch of Assembl. However, in terms of action, we did not see a lot of participation for the discussion. Later, we found that many users were unable to login and could not join because of tech-issues.
- We reached out to all the Pacesetters and registrants on Assembl in the first week of April again, asking if they were able to get on Assembl and if they needed any help. Responses poured in. There were people writing in with their experience on Assembl and the issues they faced.
- In the next few weeks, we saw a flurry of activities, lots of registrations and contributions and we collected a good volume of feedback. Some statistics to note:
 - 62 registrations/accounts created
 - 52 unique registered participants
 - 30 contributors
 - 331 visits since the beginning of the discussion
 - 491 unique page views
 - 2 minutes 46 seconds average visit duration
 - 79 unique visitors in April
 - Top 3 countries on Assembl: Canada, US and India

Testimonials

Below we share highlights from testimonials received via email. It is clear that the topic and opportunity were interesting and relevant to the recipients and they were eager to participate.

"I will post our responses by today afternoon. Thanks for checking in :-)" – Active Participant

"I need your help in navigating the platform. If I get assistance I will be glad to participate

Sorry for not replying to your earlier mail as I was already busy with year ending tasks it slipped out of my mind." - Active Participant

"Guess I need to go back to Dani's email and follow the directions more carefully. I do love being part of the conversations." - Active Participant

"Thank you for your email and followups. I am sorry for the delay - was stuck up with our projects and was having a tough time. I have joined the group and would surly keep contributing." - Active Participant

"I hadn't seen this--thanks for resending! I'll definitely take a look." - Active Participant

In addition, some people did not join but took the time to respond to our mail positively and gave a reason for not joining:

"Sorry, but I am choosing to put my time into training, teaching, speaking with early childhood educators, yoga & Brain Gym teachers, Head Starts, elementary schools, at conferences, etc. Wish you all the best" – Invited Participant

"Thanks for the invite, I am currently working towards a launch of the Designathon School platform, and simply don't have time for any more activities, next time!" - Invited Participant

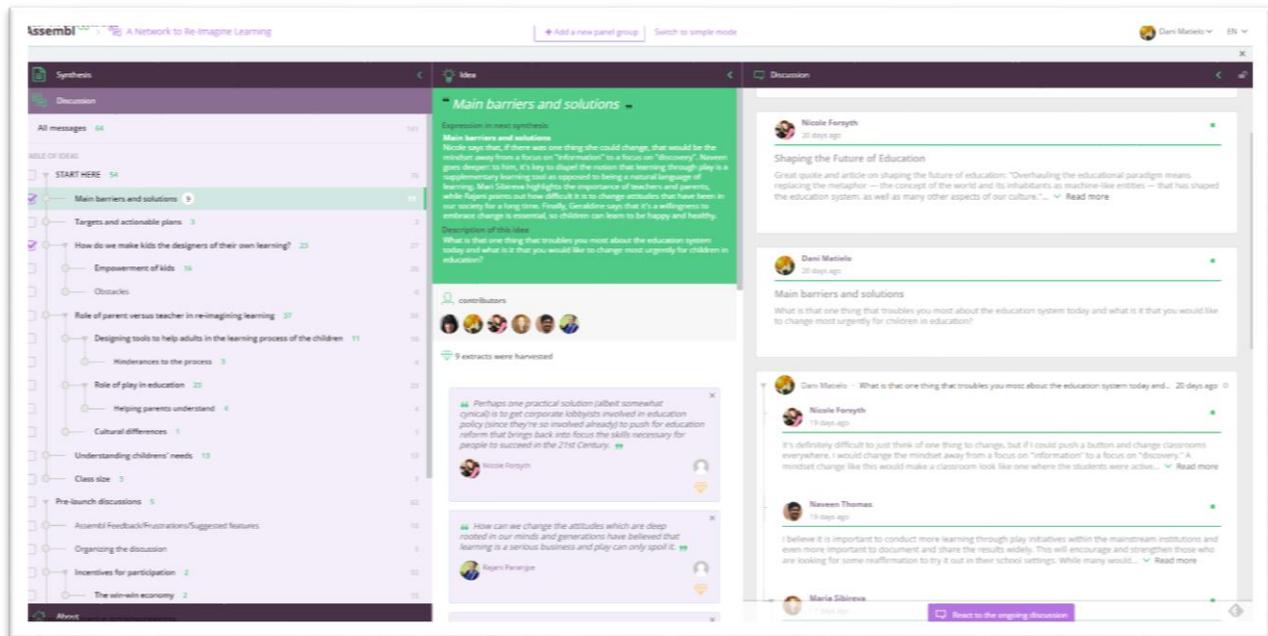
"Due to hectic travels with limited internet connectivity I regret to inform you my inability to participate in the above discussion. Please do share the report once it is ready. Warm wishes." - Invited Participant

"I simply don't have time to post. I'll see if someone else here does." - Invited Participant

"This sounds great. Sorry I couldn't participate." - Invited Participant

Technology platform

According to its website, “Assembl is an online application that enables hundreds or even thousands of people to work together effectively on the definition of new ideas. The application supports the belief that with the proper conditions, people working together can think smarter than any one member of the group could alone. Traditional collective intelligence software tends to refine ideas from one person. Assembl is different. It focuses on co-building new ideas”



Assembl builds its vision on including two key features into the platform: Harvesting and Synthesizing, discussed below, and defining three key roles:

The Orchestrators – The Orchestrators formulate what the discussion will center around. It could be any problem or topic that requires the contributions of a large group or people from many different backgrounds. The Orchestrators also set the pace for the discussion and decide upon the type of final product that will be produced e.g. a policy report, white paper, proposal, brochure, book etc. as well as the constitution of the group participating (open, semi-open, closed; small, medium or large; with or without deadlines etc.). They can also source a core of knowledgeable participants that are deemed necessary for the group to be efficient and appealing for other participants to join.

The Harvesters – The Harvesters are individuals who identify and extract the key ideas from each discussion thread. Discussion threads can happen within Assembl, can be imported from emails, or can be taken from web sources. These extracted ideas are placed into a visual map that can be easily navigated to determine key topics the discussion has covered and where a user would like to comment or jump in.

The Wrappers/Synthesizers – The Wrappers are individuals who create summaries of the key ideas and submit the syntheses to the group for rough consensus or line-by-line voting. Once the Synthesis has been validated, the Orchestrator can launch a new cycle of debate.

When we started designing our activation strategy, we initially thought that our activators group would be the harvesters. However, as the discussion and experimentation progressed, we realized that they were much more comfortable taking the role of orchestrators while letting the more technical harvesting and synthesizing tasks for our paid staff.

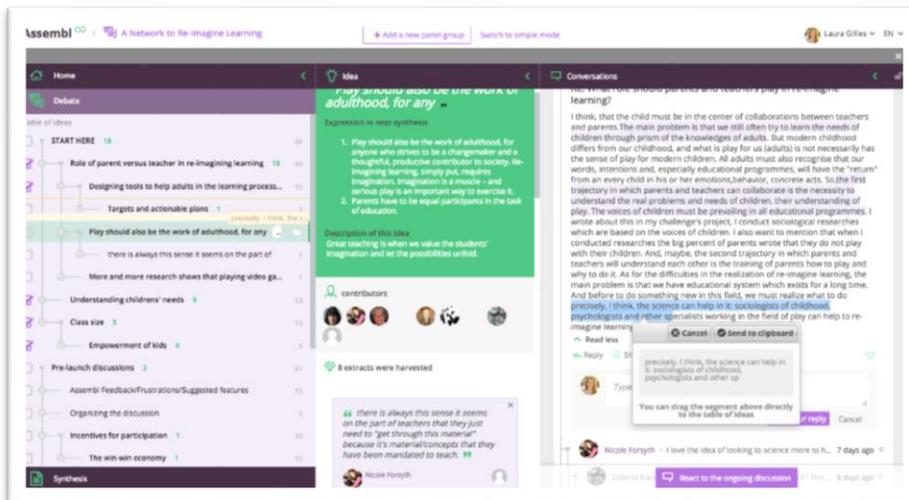
Technical Problems

As a Beta tool, expectedly technical problems were found throughout our experience with Assembl. During outreach, we realized there were many participants who could not get onto the platform due to technical problems despite trying. We reported the tech problems to the Assembl support team and tried to get resolutions for some and get them back onto the platform. We also kept in touch with the participants and kept motivating them to try again, explaining that Assembl was a new tool that we were testing to ignite this network.

Out of them, some had only limited time, so once they lost interest, they did not come back to Assembl (See examples of both below).

Feedback

We reported all feedback to the Assemble support team, both from the participants and the core group of activators working on the Assembl platform. We also helped identify and resolve some bugs on Assembl that the activators kept encountering form time to time, like problems with harvesting, screen going blank, unprompted creation of new conversation threads in the “table of ideas” panel, not able to copy/paste and such.



Screenshot of new idea threads being created at the table of ideas

Examples of email sent to Assembl support team for reporting and coordinating tech-troubleshooting.

March 15, 2015

Hi Laura,

So I went to the 'Pre Launch' discussion created by Dani and tried to harvest, reply etc. Somehow, I am unable to do much though I am logged in. Please see screenshot attached to see if I am doing anything wrong.

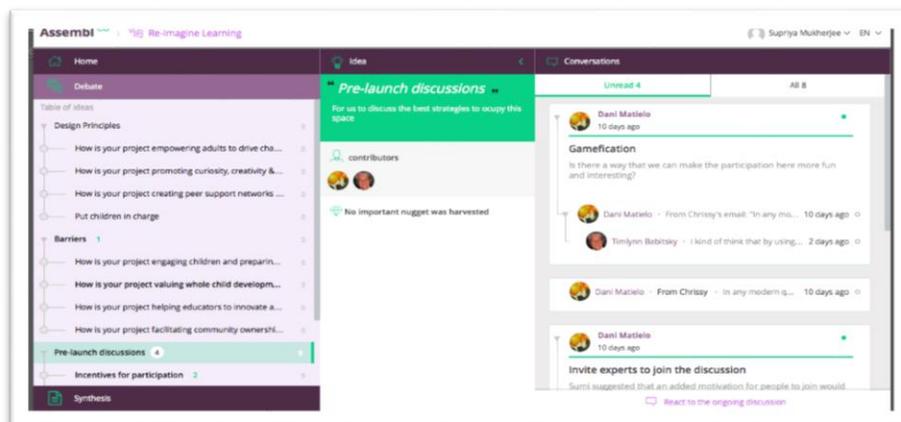
While attempting to try things out following instructions from the User Guide you sent, I am unable to see features like 'Add a new panel' at the top of the screen, or "add an idea" etc. When I am trying to harvest by highlighting the text, I am unable to drag and drop and get any other dialogue box. I don't see the 'diamond' nugget either.

Also, the 'Read more' button on the messages on the conversation panel does not seem to work unless you click on the message itself to see the complete message.

Do let me know what I am not doing right or if this is a temp tech issue.

Many thanks!

Supriya



April 3, 2015:

Hi Laura,

Just wanted to flag this tech problem that a participant is facing. Could you get back to me with a resolution so I can help her participate asap? As I mentioned to you during our call yesterday, I too often times get a blank table of ideas and have to relog-in. Also you saw while my screen sharing how the screen went blank.

Thanks so much for your help!

From: Active Participant

Date: Fri, 3 Apr 2015 12:29:05 +0700

To: Supriya

Subject: Re: Following up on the Re-imagine Learning Network Assembl discussion space - can I help?

Hello Supriya,

Yes I did went through Dani's email and I would love to join the discussion. But I haven't been able to log into the discussion space, as the link keeps giving me a blank page. I'm not sure what happens there. Can you help?

Active Participant

April 6, 2015

Hi Laura,

Here's some feedback from a participant who couldn't get on to Assembl despite trying repeatedly. How can we help and encourage him to participate now?

Thanks!

From: Supriya

Date: Mon, 6 Apr 2015 17:32:33 +0530

To: Active Participant

Subject: Re: Following up on the Re-imagine Learning Network Assembl discussion space - can I help?

Hi Active Participant,



I am so sorry that you faced these challenges getting onto the platform. Could you tell me if it was a log-in issue? As in you created a log-in and still could not log-in?

I hope you find some time to participate though I understand you will keep busy. Let me know how I can help in making sure you are able to share your insights with the re-imagine learning network through Assembl and I will be glad to help.

Best,

Supriya

From: Active Participant

Date: Fri, 3 Apr 2015 21:47:48 -0400

To: Supriya

Subject: Re: Following up on the Re-imagine Learning Network Assembl discussion space - can I help?

Thanks for follow up.

I signed up and tried to access, but the platform did not seem to be working. I don't remember what the issue was, but after 10 minutes of trying to login over and over I gave up.

I'm currently traveling in India and not sure I'll have time to meaningfully engage and participate...

Best,

Active Participant

April 10, 2015

Hi Supriya,

Yes I understand. Thanks for trying! If you could forward me all of their messages that would be awesome. I'll go through them and see what we can fix. There is definitely an issue and we are trying to figure out what it is. Sorry again for the trouble this is causing you.

Thanks,

Laura

On Fri, Apr 10, 2015 at 12:30 PM, Supriya Mukherjee wrote:

Hi Laura,

Hope you are doing well!

Just FYI, I am not able to get people to revert with screenshot or specific messages that they are seeing. They just seem to be giving feedback in general terms according to their user experience, like unable to log-in despite trying various browsers, not able to send messages on the conversation panel because of a specific feature and losing data, or not able to participate as they find the platform difficult to navigate and such.

See below one such feedback. I will forward to more such feedback along the way if that helps?

Many thanks!

Supriya

From: Active Participant

Date: Thu, 9 Apr 2015 21:51:20 -0600

To: Supriya

Subject: Re: Following up on the Re-imagine Learning Network Assembl discussion space - can I help?

Hi Supriya,

Thanks for the note and I apologize for the slow response. I did spend some time on the Assembl site but, candidly, I found it very confusing and hard to follow so didn't really find a way to participate. I apologize.

Be well and thanks again for all of your efforts!

Take care, Active Participant



Testimonials

Below are a few examples of the responses we received during outreach. Taking the Reimagine Learning engagement further through the Assembl discussion seems to have resonated with our “Pacesetters” and they got back to us with an array of feedback, which reflects their enthusiasm.

“Thank you for your invitation. I visited the site, wrote a response, pushed “send” and then a message appeared that I must write something. This was disappointing given I had just taken time to compose my thoughts to parents and teachers involvement in re-imagining learning”. Love, play, peace...” - Active Participant

“Yes I did went through Dani’s email and I would love to join the discussion. But I haven’t been able to log into the discussion space, as the link keeps giving me a blank page. I’m not sure what happens there. Can you help?” - Active Participant

“Thanks for follow up. I signed up and tried to access, but the platform did not seem to be working. I don’t remember what the issue was, but after 10 minutes of trying to login over and over I gave up.

I’m currently traveling in India and not sure I’ll have time to meaningfully engage and participate...” - Active Participant

“Yes I did managed the technical problem. As it turned out, the link that Dani sent was not working for some reason. But after some tinkering I was able to log in and participate in the discussion. Thank you for the opportunity and I will continue to stay involved in the dialogue.” - Active Participant

“Thank you for the user guide. I tried to open it many times and on different machines but without success. I am not able to log in.” Active Participant

“Apologies for the delay in replying. We have not been successful in accessing it so far. After we log in, it gets stuck over there. I guess, there is some problem with the network. We have tried to open it with different browsers and computers as well but nothing happened. We are extremely sorry!” - Active Participant

“Thanks for the note and I apologize for the slow response. I did spend some time on the Assembl site but, candidly, I found it very confusing nad hard to follow so didn’t really find a way to participate. I apologize. Be well and thanks again for all of your efforts!” - Active Participant

“Thank you for your email. I had a quick look but couldn’t easily get the online system to work. I’m on leave at the moment but I can look at it more closely once I’m back in Timor-Leste. However due to the timing and other deadlines we have this week, I don’t think I’ll be able to engage in the time allotted. But I do look forward to seeing what other have to say.” – Active Participant

To sum up, it seems that the tech-aspects of Assembl needs to be looked into seriously for future discussions and debates and the feedback collected through the Assembl project can be a great

resource for doing that. However, despite the frustrations on the tech-front, we did see a good conversation evolving and relationship building. Above, we also included emails of those who could not join due to travel or other prior or ongoing commitments but made sure to respond to us and keep the window to stay connected to this network open. This we see as a big positive.

Harvesting and Synthesis

Two other aspects of the Assembl tool were also evaluated on the backend: **Harvesting** and **Synthesizing**.

Harvesting is a particularly interesting feature of the Assembl platform. It highlights the “gems” in a long post that helps users to quickly capture the gist of a conversation they are interested in without having to go through the entire post, which they might find tedious to do, or omit altogether. Through the “harvested” content, a reader/user can tune in to the conversation and participate without disrupting the flow of the conversation.

Another advantage that we perceived is it encourages the participant to keep contributing, as “harvesting” acts as a validator of their posts and reinforces the power of their ideas.

The downside of the “harvesting” feature is that though ideally one of the main purposes of it should have been quick reference and use during creating the synthesis, content cannot be copy/pasted from there.

Synthesis is also an extremely interesting feature - it builds into the system a well-known best practice from classical forums and bulletin boards: to offer participants a summary of the discussion at the end of every week, inviting them to contribute to the new topic being offered in the following week.

As said above, if the synthesis automatically included the harvested pieces, associating them with the related topic that would certainly add an extremely high value to the Community Management experience. One of the most time consuming and not always completely accurate activities of moderating/facilitating the discussion of a community is precisely to be able to produce a relevant synthesis of what has been discussed, so newcomers can plug in to the conversation without having to read everything from the beginning. If, in the one hand, the harvested pieces since the last synthesis were automatically included on the email that is sent to the users, and the synthesis from previous weeks were much more easily accessible to new users, that would definitely bump up participation, with potential of actually changing the power law curve that Timlynn mentions in her testimony.

The process of lapidating and framing the synthesis has definitely to be manual, as the Community Manager certainly needs to be able to adjust the content according to his community. However, being able to include content by simply clicking a button would certainly improve the whole experience, free up time for the Community Manager to be invested in other activities and increase the quality of the synthesis. Overall, a fun and engaging process needs to be improved to deliver on the many amazing promises it holds.

Discussions and content

We decided to start our Assembl pre-launch discussion on Assembl itself so our core group of conversation-drivers would get a better hang of the tool before we opened the discussion to the public.

We discussed many things during the pre-launch period: the power of networking and how do we activate and nurture a network; ideal starting point for the discussion and what topic should we commence the debate with; incentives, and even feedback and frustrations about the Assembl platform.

Many insights came through from these discussions and we detected several bugs on the platform, which, we realized might not get resolved all at once. We opened up the debate to public on April 2, 2015.

What our Network Manager along with the activators also decided was that we needed to start the discussion with a topic, which would spur people to react, something provocative, but in a positive way.

Main points

The topics of discussion below were collectively decided between the Community Manager and the activators group. The collaborative decision process was key to ensure ownership of the discussion by the core group, and the relevance of the topic to the participants.

It was also key that the topics included some provocative element to spark reaction and inspire users to share their views.

Role of Parents versus Teacher in Reimagine Learning

The first big discussion debate topic opened with “roles of teachers versus parents in reimagine learning”. The topic was worded in a purposefully provocative way in order to get the new users attentions. It worked. Thoughts, ideas, observations and concerns poured in. There was a flurry of conversation and then it was time for the first synthesis. We did not get a specific answer as there were myriad aspects highlighted and everyone had a point, but what we did understand was: most agree that both teachers and parents have to play an equally crucial role if a world of ‘Reimagine Learning’ were to be realized.

At the end of each week, the Community Manager, together with the Support Team from Assembl would produce a synthesis that was distributed automatically to all participants. Highlights from the first synthesis included:

Grant Hasford, from codeSpark, provokes us: "play is not very natural for most adults and in fact most of us would benefit from lessons in how to play effectively".

Hindrances to re-imagining learning: The idea that fear of the unknown hinders parents and teachers to embrace new learning processes was brought up. What are some ways this can be overcome?

A common theme that is emerging is that kids need to feel like they are part of their learning process. This can be difficult to do when classes are large and teachers are busy. How do you view this being implemented in classrooms?

How do we make kids the designers of their own learning?

The only thing that was emerging clearly from our previous debate was the topic shaping our next round of debate: “How do we make kids the designers of their own learning?”

The synthesis sent at the end of the discussion summarizes the main points:

This week the conversation has turned to discuss the importance of recess time - “Research shows physical activity and unstructured play are essential to cognitive growth”, says Nicole Forsyth, while Eliza Factor urgently points out that “students are being asked to sit still and quietly longer than many adults can”. Chrissy Porounaki highlights the Montessori’s revolution as it “made her classroom a “joyful and independent experience” - elements that we find in children’s play. Other examples that can contribute to make a case about recess time?

Maria built on the idea that children’s imaginations are extremely powerful and that play should be considered to be closely connected with the real world. In this context, play is extremely important and useful in learning and children should be given the freedom of their imaginations.

If you could press a button, what would you change in education?

For the concluding debate, we decided to focus on a wish list and give people a chance to express their personal experiences, battles and solutions for change: What is that one thing that troubles them most about the education system today and what is it that they would like to change most urgently for children in education.

The final synthesis concludes:

Nicole says that, if there was one thing she could change, that would be the mindset away from a focus on “information” to a focus on “discovery”. Naveen goes deeper: to him, it’s key to dispel the notion that learning through play is a supplementary learning tool as opposed to being a natural language of learning. Mari highlights the importance of teachers and parents, while Rajani points out how difficult it is to change attitudes that have been in our society for a long time. Finally, Geraldine says that it’s a willingness to embrace change is essential, so children can learn to be happy and healthy.

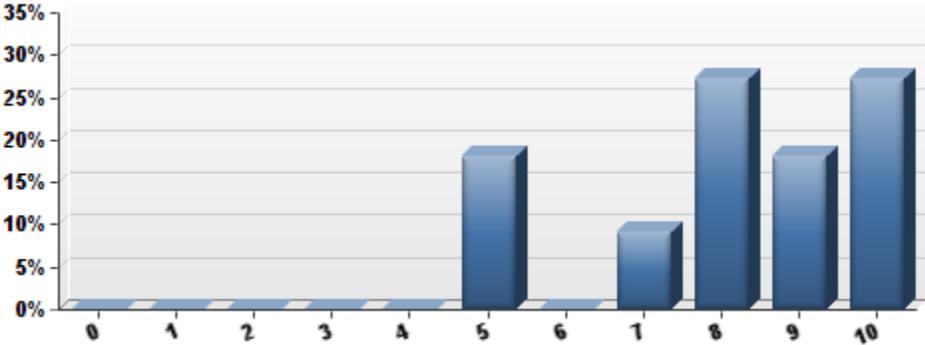
Participation (scope, geography)

- 62 accounts created
- 30 contributors
- The geographic spread was across 32 countries (With Canada, USA and India showing the highest traffic). The countries are:
 - Canada
 - United States
 - India
 - Romania
 - Russian Federation
 - Brazil
 - France
 - Greece
 - United Kingdom
 - Denmark
 - Kenya
 - Uganda
 - Indonesia
 - Kyrgyzstan
 - Singapore
 - South Africa
 - Germany
 - Ireland
 - Israel
 - New Zealand
 - Spain
 - Tanzania, United Republic of
 - Australia
 - Austria
 - Chile
 - Czech Republic
 - Ghana
 - Morocco
 - Netherlands
 - Nigeria
 - Switzerland
 - UAE

Post engagement survey analysis

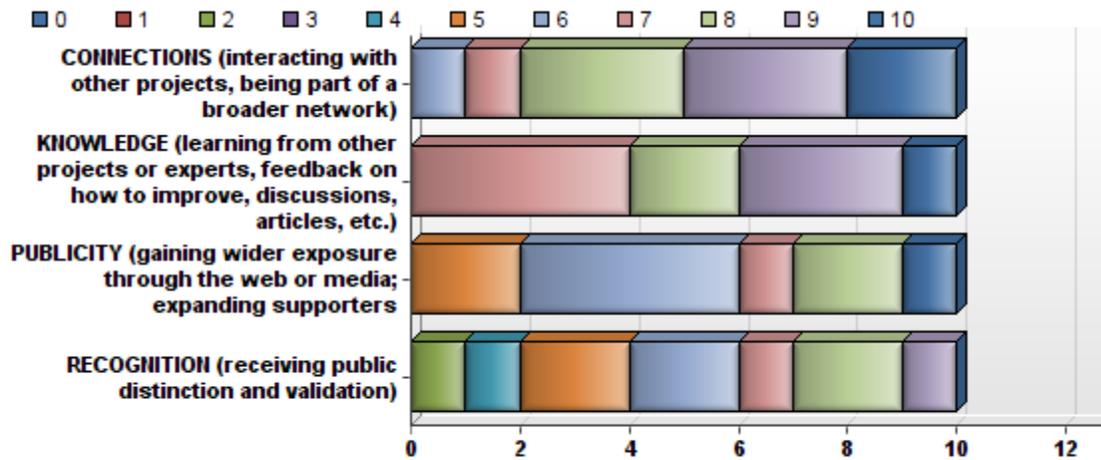
After the conclusion of the engagement, we distributed a survey among all unique registered users in the platform (62). We received 11 complete surveys (22%) from participants. It's clear that, even though reporting a general positive experience with Ashoka and the platform, that some of our initial goals, as to contribute to the evolution of the innovator's' perspective on their practice, were not as successful.

Did you receive a valuable return on the resources you put in (time, effort, etc.)?



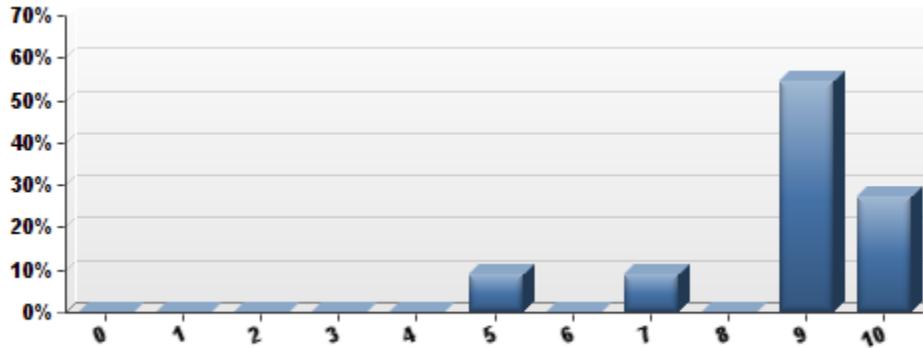
More than 40% of our users gave us a 9-10 on the value they received from using the platform, indicating that even with the technical difficulties, they found it worthwhile to participate. The lower ratings (below 7) show, however, that for some of our users the experience was not valuable enough in terms of the time it demanded. According to our discussion during the pre-launch period, it is essential to find the right balance between time and incentive to participate, in order to achieve better results and experience for participants.

Please rate the quality of the following benefits Ashoka seeks to provide:

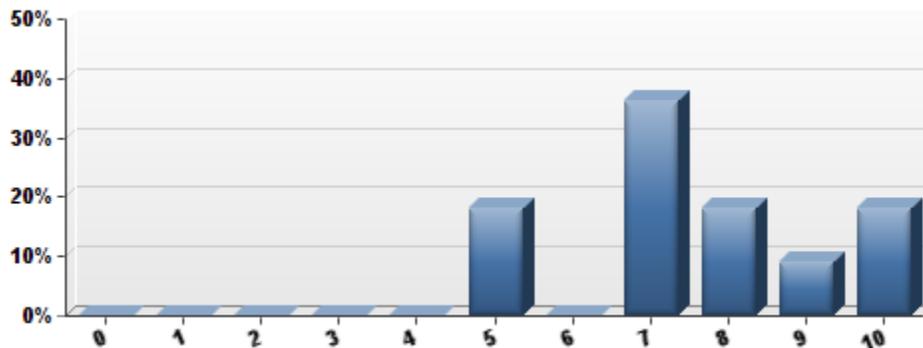


To understand the benefits identified by the users while using the platform in a better way, we can analyze the graphic above: clearly, the two main benefits reported by the users are the connections and knowledge developed from using the platform (blue and purple bars). Expectedly, Publicity had a much lower score, with more than half of the respondents giving it a six or less. In a closed platform, visibility is a bigger challenge to achieve as a benefit. However, the last aspect, "Recognition" is a feature that can be certainly embedded in the platform: as much as there are built-in functionalities for the users to be recognized for their participation, these features seem to not be achieving the desired effect - and thus, not inspiring participation as a result.

By engaging with Ashoka, I believe I'm better equipped to achieve my goals.

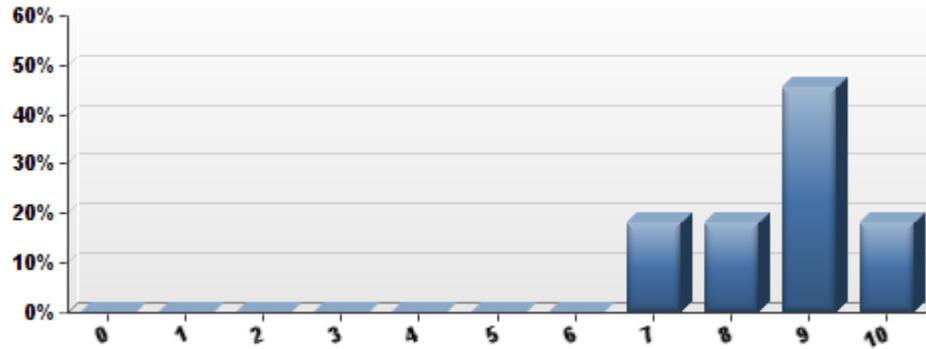


Do you feel like you shared similar values and vision with others in the network?

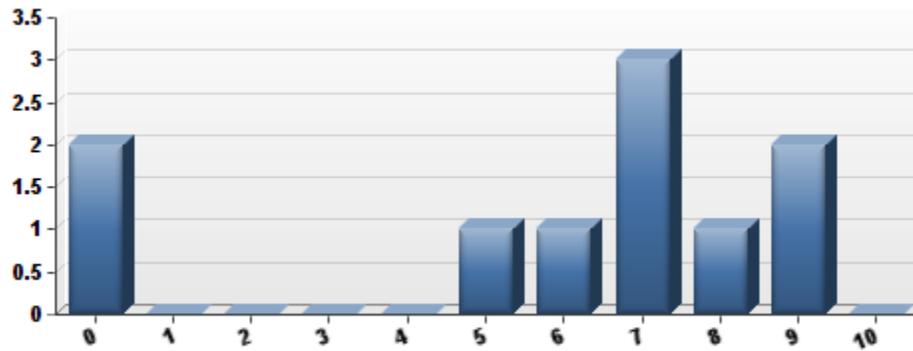


The distribution of answers on the two graphics above shows that even though there was a very clear alignment of values and visions among the people using the platform, the discussions did not contribute to better equip the users to achieve their goals. Possibly, if we had more dissonance of opinions, the conflicts might generate higher-level arguments and inspire people to bring other resources to prove their points. For a debate environment, such a strongly aligned group is not completely desirable and, if it is the case, there needs to be external input that will generate higher reflection and knowledge production.

Did you gain a better understanding of other projects or the broader field?

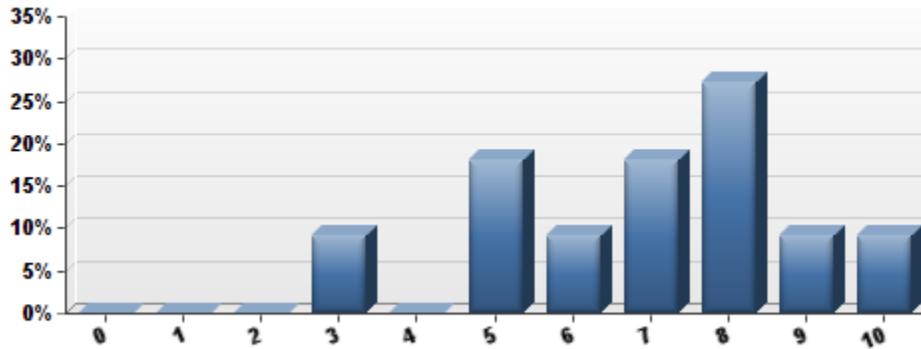


Did you evolve your strategy as a result of participating?

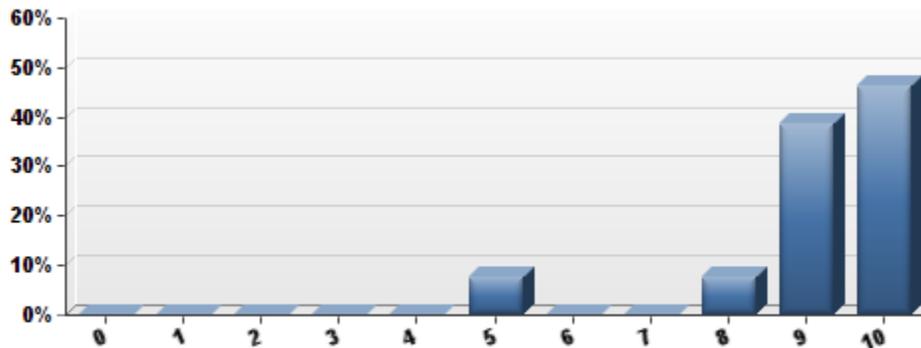


Interestingly, even though the users reported having acquired a better understanding of the projects and the broader field by joining the discussion, this did not result in an evolution of their own strategy. This is expected, as Assembl was not a tool directly connected to a pitching or evaluation experience: to the extent that users were not motivated to apply the knowledge somewhere, the discussions were not a good source for them to evolve their strategy and bring that new acquired knowledge to their day-to-day work.

Did you have a good experience on the use of the discussion platform (Assembl)?



On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend Ashoka to a friend or colleague?



Finally, these two last graphics illustrate the dual relationship the users had with the engagement. When asked about their overall experience with the platform, users are clear to report that it was not always smooth: while a smaller percentage (23%) can be considered as Promoters, the NPS analysis of the first graphic results in $23 - 54 = -31$ (Promoters - 10 or 9, minus Detractors (8 >)).

Still, the experience with the platform did not have a larger impact on the overall experience of the users as part of the discussion: the second graphic shows a high NPS score of 71, reflecting a more correlated relationship with the clear values and visions alignment among participants than the platform itself. It is clear that, as long as the technology can consistently allow connections to be made, interested users will be able to overcome the barriers in order to connect.

Conclusions and recommendations

Social innovators and social entrepreneurs are an unusually tricky group to engage: because they are so focused on their own projects and impact, the perceived value of them joining a discussion platform in relation to the time required for their participation needs to be high. We addressed this issue with two strategies during our platform: we made sure to provide high quality engagement experiences to our activators group, not only at the platform but also during our weekly calls and email. To ensure the commitment of a core group that understands more deeply the ultimate purpose of the community is key to activate the conversation and maintain it active.

This aspect is especially important in the face of a technology that might present technical shortcomings: if the main value perceived by participants are the connections they can find while using the tool, then having enough voices being part of the operation is a sine qua non condition to keep it active.

In order to address the shortcomings presented by the platform, the next step is certainly to move the perspective from a more theoretical approach to collective intelligence to translate the very relevant and clearly valuable concepts into features that can be easily used by the constituency.

In this sense, building on the extensive feedback provided by our activators group and users that participated on the pilot, revisit the four key points which were identified as barriers for the evolution of the discussion:

- Onboarding: needs to be easy and quick, so we don't lose the participants interest
- Language: Seek to use language and expressions that at least the more advanced users already know. For example, "Table of ideas" does not connect with any previous knowledge a user might have in terms of online discussion.
- Information architecture: try to organize the information following the logic of more well known websites, such as Facebook. Define a clear hierarchy between the different pieces of the interface: what is essential for the user to read in order to participate and what is less important? If the harvesting pieces are the more important elements, for example, maybe the panel with the actual messages could be hidden on the standard view.
- Clarity of where to start: since Assembl is proposing a new model to organize the discussion, it is important to make it much more clear how users start participating. User-guides are not useful in this sense - the technology must be intuitive enough so a newcomer can find out their way around without needing to read anything. More colors and images might come a long way to ease the use of the platform.
- Incentives for participation must be at the forefront: being it a gamification strategy or just a recognition of best participants, the current reputation feature is not achieving its goals of stimulating users to contribute.

The Assembl tool has a great merit to address the main challenges faced by current discussion and community tools, where Facebook plays a giant role today but cannot deliver on achieving a high level of discussion among a higher number of participants.

As much as we see initial discussions among Facebook users, sometimes with quite in-depth arguments, the Facebook platform is certainly not prepared to produce a collective vision of what is being discussed. The other approach being used is by tapping into more superficial knowledge,

using simpler mechanisms that rely on quantitative metrics to aggregate opinions. These tools, such as Yelp!, for example, rely on the amount of attention the user acquires with their participation, but is not able to combine the opinions of different users to produce a better result. Quora is, potentially, the current platform that comes closer to achieving this goal, but it relies on the users themselves building their participation on what has been shared before, which doesn't really innovates from the more classic approaches to community building.

In this sense, it is clear that, if fixing and developing the needed features reported above, Assembl has a high potential to bring online discussions and collective intelligence activation to the next level - a very well needed solution in a world where we very much need to produce better and faster solutions to its growing problems.